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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
as Set Forth in the NEW TESTAMENT

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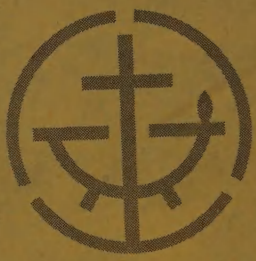
GEORGE G. FINDLAY, B.A., D.D.



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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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NEW TESTAMENT

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

AS SET FORTH IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

Being Two Lectures addressed to Methodists of Leeds.

BY

GEORGE G. FINDLAY, B.A., D.D.

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PREFACE.

THE two following were the first of a series of Lectures, addressed in the course of last winter to young people in the Eldon Wesleyan chapel, Leeds. They are published, with some additions, at the request of the Leeds Wesleyan Methodist Ministers' Meeting, and with the hope that in their printed form they may reach a wider circle than the writer's voice could command.

Thankful will he be if any word of his should in the smallest measure serve to knit more closely the children of Methodism to their mother Church.

G. G. F.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AS SET FORTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

I.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST.

THE Church of Christ is the grandest and most wonderful institution of human history. Political and national questions, momentous as they often are, possess only a passing and secondary importance compared to Church questions, compared to those questions which arise from the relations of mankind to Jesus Christ and which concern the kingdom of God. Let us realize the immense interest attaching to the subject, and the importance for ourselves of forming right views and sentiments in regard to it.

The word *church* has, to begin with, a curious origin. It is the same as the Scottish *kirk*, the

German *kirche*; and is found in all the languages of the Teutonic stock. It is traced back to the Greek *kyriakon*, signifying *the Lord's* (*house*). This word, in the form *kirika*, appears to have been learnt by the Goths, or southern German tribes, from their Greek-Christian neighbours, and conveyed by them to their northern kindred; and it was thus brought to our shores by the Anglo-Saxon invaders while they were still heathen. In the third and fourth centuries after Christ, the German barbarians crossed the boundaries of the Roman empire in great numbers, both as marauding invaders and as mercenary soldiers. Their attention was struck by the numerous and rich buildings raised for Christian worship. These *kirika* they had often, no doubt, plundered and destroyed. They carried back with them to their homes a vivid recollection of the Christian churches; and when the first missionaries of the cross appeared in Germany and England, they found this word already there before them. Through the Lord's house the Lord's name had taken possession of this new region, in which it was to win mighty triumphs. From the *house* of the Lord the title *kirk* (in southern English, *church*) was easily extended to the *people* of the Lord.

The original term of the New Testament is

ecclesia, not *kyriakon* or *kirk*. This signified the *assembly* or *meeting*; then, in later Christian writers, it came to mean the *place of meeting*. In this twofold signification, *ecclesia* passed, with the religion of Christ, into the Latin and Keltic tongues, becoming, for example, the French *église*, and the Welsh *eglwys*, the Cornish *eglos*, the Manx *egglish*, and so on. *Ecclesia*, the mother of all these words, was the primary name of the society founded by Jesus Christ, which our Teutonic forefathers have taught us to call "the Church." This venerable word *ecclesia* had already played a conspicuous part in Greek life, before it became Christian. As it appears in the New Testament, it was employed by Jews speaking the Greek language, and its meaning on their lips was coloured by Hebrew ideas. It has come from a Greek source, through a Jewish channel. We must take both these factors into account.

In its pure Greek sense, *ecclesia* means "the called-out." It denoted the town's meeting, the assembly of citizens convoked by the herald,—those called out by the official summons from amongst the strangers or slaves, from the mass of unenfranchised inhabitants, and required to take their part in the affairs of the city. The Old Testament gave to this political conception a religious turn of meaning. *Ecclesia* was

employed in the Greek rendering of the Hebrew Scriptures to denote the solemn religious assembly of Israel, the "congregation" gathered in Jehovah's presence, to render Him worship and to receive His word. Now, in the Christian vocabulary, *ecclesia* drew its signification from both these sources; it combined these two sets of associations. The vessel, thus fashioned and prepared by the Potter's hand upon the wheel of time, shaped for its higher use by the best influences of Greek civil life and of Jewish faith and national feeling, was now ready to receive its Divine content. The *ecclesia*, the Church of God, is the New Testament designation of the spiritual Israel; it denotes the holy community of Christ's people, summoned from the world by the call of the gospel heralds, and united in work and worship as citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

So much for the etymology of the word. We must now adjust this term to other New Testament designations, especially to those employed by our Lord to mark out His people. The Church begins to be spoken of freely under this name only in St. Paul's epistles, where it had acquired its distinct character, as separated from the Jewish commonwealth. The word "church" occurs but twice in the Gospels—in the 16th and

18th chapters of St. Matthew. Jesus employs it there with a somewhat prophetic meaning, and in providing for the future. Commonly our Lord speaks, like John the Baptist, of "the kingdom of God," or (in Matthew) "of heaven." In the Sermon on the Mount, in the Parables, in the great Discourses of Judgement, we read always of the Kingdom, not the Church. "Thy *kingdom* come," He taught us to pray to the Father.

Much has been written about the relation of the ideas of Kingdom and Church of God; and very different views of the question have been put forth. These terms denote the same object, but with a difference. The thought of "the kingdom" was that which lay nearest to the Jewish mind; it signified to the Jews the reign of God upon earth through the Son of David, and through the ascendency of His chosen people over the nations. In the times of Jesus the Israelites were full of this exciting hope. The conflict of our Lord with His people turned upon this very point, upon the true nature of the Messiah's kingdom and the purpose of God respecting it. As compared with *church*, the *kingdom* is the larger expression: it includes things as well as persons; it covers the entire range of human affairs, so far as they are directed by the laws of

God and come under the sovereignty of the Lord Christ. Business, politics, art and science, national and domestic life, all belong to the kingdom of God in its widest sense. In its essence and governing forces that kingdom is spiritual, but in its effects and operations the kingdom of God extends to every department and item of man's life. It works as a leaven in the entire lump of humanity. Its full manifestation and glory are reserved for the second coming of the Lord. When God's will is done, "as in heaven so on earth," when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet and the voice is heard proclaiming, "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever," then only will the kingdom of God be fully realized.

Now the Church is the body of the recognised citizens of this Divine kingdom. The sons of God are heirs of His kingdom, here and hereafter, inasmuch as they belong to the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ. They are, as we read in the Revelation, "companions in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus." The Church, therefore, is composed of *persons*; its interests and relationships are strictly personal. It is the Christian community, the society of the followers of Jesus Christ and fellow-citizens in

the New Jerusalem. Roughly speaking, the Church is related to the kingdom as the electorate of our own country to the British empire.

These "sons of the kingdom" Jesus commonly speaks of by two titles. They are "the disciples" in virtue of their relationship to Him, they are "the brethren" in relation to each other. The former of these names naturally predominates in the Gospels; it disappears in the Epistles (where *saints* becomes a common epithet of Christian believers); in the Acts of the Apostles *disciples* gradually gives place to *brethren*. But it is a title of permanent application: all the Lord's people are *disciples*, students of Jesus Christ. He is their Rabbi, and it is their business to sit at His feet and learn of Him. The other expression, "brethren," was familiar amongst the Jews, who regarded each other, and do still, as members of one family as against the rest of the world. Christ accustomed the disciples to use it with a higher meaning, as when He said: "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, and you are all brethren. And call none your father upon earth: for one is your Father, the heavenly Father." Matt. xxiii. 8–10.

On three occasions, each of them deeply significant, the Lord Jesus linked His disciples with Himself by this name of "brothers": when He

said, distinguishing His natural and spiritual kindred, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God, and do it"; again, when He bade the Magdalene tell the good news of His rising from the grave "to My brothers, and say, I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God"; in the third place, when foretelling the awards of the Judgement Day, He announced that the Judge will say to those on the right hand, to those who helped His poor and persecuted people, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me." These He calls "children of My Father," so strong and tender is the bond that unites Him to the lowliest of God's children on earth.

Mark iii. 31–35. Luke viii. 19–21. John xx. 17. Matt. xxv. 34–40.

Sometimes He calls them, endearingly, "children, little children"; sometimes, "sons of the kingdom, sons of the bride-chamber, sons of light"; He promises that they shall be "sons of the resurrection, equal to the angels," "sons of the Most High." While the Saviour thus exalts His brethren, He humbly takes part with them by the name He chooses, out of all names, for Himself: "the Son of man."

Mark x. 24. John xiii. 33. Matt. xiii. 38; ix. 15. Luke xvi. 8; xx. 34–36.

I have brought these expressions together in order to show what idea the Lord Jesus formed of

the constituency of His Church. True, He foresaw that there would be false brethren, unfaithful disciples,—tares growing amongst the wheat, bad fish along with good drawn in by the gospel net. But the wheat possesses a fixed character, and the tares pass for wheat because they assume that character. The figures of the wheat-field and the fishing-net do not make for a vague, ill-defined conception of Church membership, and loose ideas of Church discipline; rather the opposite. If there was a Judas amongst Christ's disciples, there was, notwithstanding, a clear line of demarcation between His disciples and the world. Only the Master's eye could detect the difference amongst them. The members of the Church are such as are, or at least are taken to be, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, brethren to each other in virtue of their common devotion to Him, and declared subjects of God's kingdom upon earth.

Matt. xiii. 24–30, 47–50.

We are now prepared to take up the momentous passage in which Christ is recorded to have first called His Church by this name. I refer to His conversation with the disciples in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi, related in Matthew xvi. 13–20. This was the crisis of our Lord's earthly ministry. It is clear that the Jewish nation will reject Him. He leaves the wrangling Pharisees,

He leaves the fickle and clamorous multitude, and retreats into solitude with His disciples. After much prayer, He turned to them as they walked along, with the abrupt and searching question, "Who do you say that I am?—The multitudes say this and that: what say you?" At once the answer leaps from the ready lips of Simon, as fire from the heart of rock struck by true steel: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" And Jesus answered: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona! It was not flesh and blood that revealed it to thee, but My Father in heaven. And I say unto thee: Thou art Peter (the man of the rock), and on this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her."

You see how commanding a place this intention held in the purposes of Christ. In response to Simon's hidden thought, there comes out the hidden thought of Jesus, the supreme reply and supreme reward for the confession of His name,—the grand declaration: "I will build My Church!" Upon the basis furnished by St. Peter's confession of faith, which is the kernel of all the creeds, a confession uttered in the name of the entire body of Christ's disciples present and to come,—on this foundation the great structure is to be reared. Every confessor of the Christ, every Peter-like

man, to whom it pleases the Father in heaven to make this revelation concerning His Son, counts for a living stone in that building of God, which will prove to be the one imperishable fabric of human life,— "My Church," as the Redeemer calls it, in contrast with the reprobate and decaying Jewish congregation. Comp. Matt. xvi. 18 and 1 Peter ii. 4–8.

Observe that He says, "I will *build* My Church"; and building means plan, order, unity and combination; it implies labour and pains, the squaring and shaping and fitting together of many stones, a gradual and perhaps difficult construction. Christ's purpose was not to save souls only, to rescue individual men from spiritual ruin, but to build a Church,—to reconstruct and save human society. On the ground of faith in His name He is founding a community of redeemed men, taught by the heavenly Father, and in fellowship and union with Himself.

The confessors of Jesus, of whom Peter is the mouthpiece and the type, will open the doors of the kingdom of heaven to mankind. They will carry the authority of that kingdom with them wherever they go, and publish its laws and its freedom, its prohibitions and its pardons, through the whole world. Such appears to be the import of our Lord's further promise to the arch-apostle:

"I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"—the mighty words proudly inscribed around the dome of St. Peter's Church in Rome, and which have been monopolised by the Catholic hierarchy with disastrous and cruel effect.

To Simon Peter belonged the initiative, in confession and in action—a unique honour, in which there could be neither sharer nor successor. The apostle Peter was the spokesman of Pentecost, the opener of the gospel gate both to Jew and Gentile; he was the master-builder who laid down the first course of the new foundation. But the initiative is no monopoly. Acknowledging his rights, we bow to the chair of Peter, on which sits to-day not Leo XIII., but Peter himself, teaching and ruling from the pages of the New Testament.

That the words concerning binding and loosing were not addressed to the apostle Peter in any merely personal or official sense, is clear from their repetition in the plural in the 18th verse of the 18th chapter of the same Gospel, where they are applied to the relations of ordinary Christian brethren: "Whatsoever you bind on the earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." The like promise

was uttered when Jesus, after His resurrection, breathed on His disciples, saying, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; whose soever ye retain, they are retained." John xx. 21–23. These mysterious words were not addressed to one apostle, or to the apostles as such, but to the gathered "disciples" of the risen Lord. As Bishop Westcott says, with whom our own Dr. Moulton in his Commentary on St. John's Gospel agrees: "The commission must be regarded properly as the commission of the Christian society, and not as that of the Christian ministry."

The Church of Christ exerts continually a condemning and absolving influence in each and all of its members, so far as they possess the Spirit of their Head and are in fellowship with Him. Those who share St. Peter's faith share his power. Each confessor of the Son of God is empowered to open to the penitent, so far as human hands may, that gate of faith through which himself has passed. Each Christian believer, according to the grace and wisdom given him, in his appointed place, may teach the young and ignorant the law of the Divine kingdom, with its bonds and blessings; and he does it with as good right, with a power as directly conferred by the Spirit of the risen Christ, as any Pope of Rome.

In the 18th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel our Lord speaks once more, by name, of "the Church" that He had promised to build. This chapter contains a body of important doctrine bearing upon the subject. From it we may extract certain moral conditions of membership in the Christian brotherhood; let us call them *the rules of the Society of Jesus.* His disciples were contending, as, alas! they do still, who should be greatest among them. He took a little child and set him, abashed and humble, in the midst for their example. Thus (1) Christ prescribed *a child-like disposition* as the token of His Spirit, the essential mark of churchmanship.

Matt. xviii. 1–5.

He enjoins on His disciples humbleness and docility. He puts to shame our emulations and self-assertion, our love of place and power.

vers. 6–9.

(2) A second requirement is *inoffensiveness.* Christ denounces a fearful woe on the man who makes one of His little ones to stumble. He bids us cut off the right hand, or pluck out an eye, rather than by our offence bring disgrace upon our Master's name, and run the risk ourselves of stumbling into hell. (3) A third qualification for the exercise of Church membership is *sympathy,* the opposite of harshness and contempt,—a tender care for the young around us, and for the weak

vers. 10–14.

and erring, such pity as the Good Shepherd has for lost and misguided sheep.

(4) Kindred to the last is *forgivingness.* This prescription occupies more than half the chapter. Our blessed Lord knew what was in man; He foresaw the great need there would be for the exercise of this grace amongst us. vers. 15–35. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" The generous apostle thought this a great stretch of charity,—the perfection of pardon, "until *seven* times"! His Master replied: "I do not say to thee, Till seven times; but, Till *seventy times seven*"! This rule Christ enforces by the parable of the Two Debtors, making us to understand that however much we may forgive our fellow men, it is an inconsiderable fraction of that which God has forgiven to us.

In enforcing this law, our Lord laid down wise and simple rules for dealing with the offence of brother against brother in the Church, vers. 15–17. —directions which, if they were acted upon, would prevent a world of scandal and backbiting. It is here, and in precisely this connexion, that the Head of the Church gave His pledge to be present, "where two or three are met together in His name."

Child-likeness, purity of conduct, tenderness of

heart, patient forgivingness: these are the social qualities of Church life. These are the marks that distinguish Christian from worldly society, the tempers that prevail in what Jesus Christ calls "My Church." How far do they characterize Leeds Methodism, and English Christian life? They are not wanting amongst us, we thankfully believe: may they abundantly increase!

Underneath these social and moral qualifications there lies the fundamental condition of fellowship with Jesus Christ, presupposed throughout—viz. *personal submission to the will of God.* "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father in heaven," the Lord had said earlier than this, "he is My brother, and sister, and mother."

Matt. xii. 46–50.
Mark iii. 31–35.
Luke viii. 19–21.

The rules we have now enumerated it would be easy to resolve into the two master laws of Jesus, on which all law and prophets hang: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"; and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Matt. xxii. 35–40.
Mark xii. 28–34.
Luke x. 25–28.

There is one principle, finally, which binds together the two great commandments and runs like a silver chain through the precepts of the Lord Jesus, the principle of *loyalty to Himself.* This He asserts, expressly or tacitly, in all His

dealings with men, as when He says: "He that loves father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me"; and again: "One is your Master, and all ye are brethren." Matt. x. 37, 38; xxiii. 8–10; etc.

Our Lord's prophecies of Judgement, extending from the 20th to the 25th chapter of St. Matthew, and variously recorded by SS. Mark and Luke, imply His previous teaching respecting His kingdom or Church. In these discourses Christ contemplates His disciples not as a number of individuals only and in their personal responsibility to Him, but as an organized community. They serve within one house and vineyard; they are entrusted severally with one and the same Divine property: they will be judged by their conduct towards the Master and His goods, and towards each other as fellow servants. This line of reflexion we cannot here follow up in detail. But it deserves a frequent place in our thoughts; it lends a solemn aspect to our Church work and our Christian obligations. We gather from it still another series of titles for the members of the Church: they are "servants of the Lord," "labourers" in the vineyard of God, "guests" of Christ's wedding-feast, "watchers" for His return. Matt. xx. 1; xxii. 11; xxiv. 45; xxv. 1, 14. Luke xii. 35–48.

There is one brief word of Judgement bearing on the matter in hand, which we must observe, one

of the few sayings of Jesus recorded by St. Mark alone: "Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Good is the salt: but if the salt become saltless, wherewith will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another." This follows Christ's stern teaching concerning offences, and the warning that a man should sooner part with hand or eye than expose himself to be cast "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." As much as to say: Fire there must be, wherever there is corruption, either hell-fire or purgatory — not a future, but a present and inward purgatory; either the fire that burns out the offending limb, the offending lust, or the fire that will hereafter consume the whole corrupted man. The remedial fire our Lord represents by the figure of *salt*, which was used emblematically in the ancient sacrifices; for salt arrests corruption and saves from the devouring worm. But salt smarts while it saves. It is the wholesome astringent, that mortifies our pride and spoils our vain pleasures and kills our corruptions. But if that process fails and God's chastening dispensations cease to bite and burn into the soul, no remedy is left but the fires of the last Judgement. After this excursion, Jesus returns to the main point of His discourse:

Mark ix. 49, 50.

"Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." You see the connexion of these two ideas. It is men unhumbled and undisciplined, without meekness and self-restraint, *saltless* men, that make trouble in the Church. Contention is a sign of corruption somewhere: its outbreak proves that we need re-salting. Peace comes with grace; and grace has its knife to prune, its salt to season us, as well as its wine and oil to restore and cheer us.

We pass on to the closing discourse of our Lord to His disciples, assembled at the table of the Last Supper. There He revealed all that was deepest in Himself,—a love such as the heart of man towards man had never known. Greater the love of Christ to His Church than the love of husband to dearest wife, or fondest mother to her child. And in this love is the Church's treasure, her refuge and strength. From St. Matthew's record we have learnt something of the temper of Christian brotherhood, of *the moral qualifications* for service in its ranks. These farewell sayings will teach us what are *the spiritual elements* of Church fellowship, whence the Christian society derives its life and its power. We have spoken of the five rules of the society of Jesus: we find in this later teaching five constituent elements of the new

John xiii.–xvii.

society: they constitute the forces that create and sustain it, the objects for which it exists and the ideal it pursues.

In this light, look (1) at the Divine Master washing His disciples' feet. By this He taught them, and us, many lessons. Chief of them was this: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me!" Add to that the sacramental saying, "My blood is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins," and we arrive at St. John's interpretation in his First Epistle: "Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood" are we washed from sin. We recognise the primary and all-essential condition of life in Christ; it is *soul-cleansing*. That is wrought by the baptism of repentance, and the sprinkling on heart and conscience of the blood of Jesus. None can have part with Christ, none can therefore rightly belong to His Church, but he who has received "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins," or at least is seeking that redemption.

John xiii. 1–17.
Matt. xxvi. 28.
Mark xiv. 24.
Luke xxii. 20.
1 Cor. xi. 25.

1 John v. 6; comp. i. 7.

Eph. i. 7.
Col. i. 14.

(2) Close upon the idea of cleansing comes that of *inspiration*. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, the new birth is "of water and of spirit." Evil is removed; good is infused. Sin and death are washed away; holiness

John iii. 3–6.

and life are breathed into the penitent, believing heart.

Our Lord is now departing from the visible Church; He is in the act of providing in the blood of the eternal covenant the means of cleansing His people to the end of time and from all sin. At this point, therefore, He introduces to them, as one may say, His Holy Spirit. This Spirit will dwell in them, the active principle, and the common principle of the life they are to live henceforth. This other Advocate shall be all that He had been to them, and still more. He is another, and yet not another; for by His virtue the Redeemer will live and work in them as never before, by a complete spiritual possession. But mark that in all Christ's words respecting this Other One, it is understood that He is a common gift, a common presence, a single element of life diffused through the society of the disciples.

Heb. ix. 12–15; xiii. 20.

John xiv. 16–19

So when the fire-baptism fell upon them at Pentecost, it was in "tongues of fire parting asunder," tongues visibly darting out from one central fiery orb. Such is the chosen symbol of the Holy Ghost. The flame that warms your heart, that glows in your song or speech, is not your own; it is a part of the communion of the Holy Ghost,—a tongue that

Acts ii. 3, 4.

leaps forth to kindle your spirit from the fire that burns everlastingly in the heart of the Church of the living God.

(3) We are brought already to the third factor of Church life. The existence of the Christian society is *the expression of Christ Himself* in the world. "I am the vine, you the branches."

John xv. 1–16.

The careful reader will see how all the other ideas and teachings of that evening are centred and brought to a head in the image of the vine. The vine-stock is seen no more; the root is buried in the earth. But it is not dead! Spring follows winter; the breath of resurrection is abroad. See, the dead vine springs up in immortal freshness! Christ lives again, not in His risen Person only, but in the persons of three thousand converted men. That vine is guarded and dressed by the Divine Husbandman, and, trained by His hand, spreads over the earth its countless branches to feed and bless with its fruit the nations. You perceive how essential to this figure is the idea not only of union with Christ for every branch and twig and leaf of the mighty plant, but also that of communion with each other on the branches' part; since they jointly contain and set forth the life of the single vine. The vital sap of this many-branched vine is sent by Christ from

Acts ii.

the Father along the ten thousand subtle channels of the Church's life. Christ Himself, through the Spirit, is the virtue that the currents of grace bear with them. The vine forms itself in each branch, and pours its substance and sweetness into every cluster of the ripening fruit.

(4) Next, we find that *the world's enmity* is to be a leading feature of the Church's life, common to the members with the Head. This enmity will entail many hardships and losses, to be endured with a good courage. It will finally be overcome by Christ's disciples, aided by the witness of the Spirit of Truth, who is the helper of the Church and advocate of Jesus. That Spirit of Truth will succeed at last in convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgement. Of this conviction the united testimony of believers is the instrument, wielded by the Holy Spirit.

John xv. 18 to xvi. 11.

John xiv. 26; xv. 26, 27; xvi. 7–15.

(5) Finally, in our Lord's great prayer to the Father on the Church's behalf, we find the union of His people compared to and based upon *the unity of the Father and Son within the Godhead.* Let us read His solemn words: "Not for these alone do I ask, but also for those who through their word believe in Me,—that they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so

John xvii.

that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And as for Me, the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given them, in order that they may be one, as *We* are one: I in them and Thou in Me—that they may be made perfect into one, that the world may know that *Thou* didst send Me, and that Thou lovedst them as Thou lovedst Me."

vers. 20–23.

Who can express the profound emotion with which these words fill the Christian heart? This is the supreme desire of Jesus Christ for His people —the end to which He looked forward when He said, "I will build My Church." Its declaration is followed only by the prayer that they may be with Him to behold His heavenly glory.

ver. 24.

Jesus Christ's prayers were prophecies. When He says, "Father, I will," His word sets at work a chain of causes certain to accomplish their result, whether in one day or in a thousand or twenty thousand years. There is to be amongst the multitude of those who bear the name of Christ on earth a unity of knowledge, affection, and will as real as that subsisting between Christ and God Himself, a union concerning the same objects and directed to the same ends in which the Father and the Son are eternally agreed. It is a oneness in fellowship with God through Christ that Christ anticipates for His disciples.

What is this but to realize to the full, what we realize in part already, the communion of the Holy Spirit, in whom the Father and the Son share eternally? When this is brought to pass, Christ's mission will be ended. The world will believe in Him. The world will be absorbed in the Church, and the Church co-extensive with the world. The kingdom of God will be come, and His will done on earth as in heaven.

Can we say that the Christian unity now existing approaches this ideal; or that it is approximately realized in any one of the great bodies into which the Church is at present divided? I fear that we cannot. The goal seems to be far off. The history of the Church is a melancholy contrast to that prayer. Should we approach nearer to that unity by breaking up the existing Church fellowships,—by dissolving, for example, our Methodist societies and merging them in one or other of those two ancient communions that claim to represent to us the original society of Christ and His apostles — in the Established Church of England, or the Church of Rome? That is not the way to unity and peace. By doing so, we should delay and not hasten the day of the Lord; we should be abandoning the charge that Christ has laid upon us; we should be

surrendering principles of vital moment for the future of Christianity.

Let us cherish our own fellowship, and keep a warm fire burning on the Methodist hearth. Let us purify and deepen, if we can, our existing Church life. In this way we shall contribute most to the Church of the future. The prayer of the Lord Jesus teaches us that sanctity is the way to unity. Let us cultivate friendship and alliance with all Christian bodies, and especially with our Methodist kinsfolk, discussing differences with the desire to come to an agreement. Above all, let us be true disciples, studying Jesus Christ and drinking deeply into His Spirit. This will be the ultimate solvent of our doubts and differences. We shall be reunited at last in the confession of St. Peter—in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. "I in them, and Thou in Me, O Father," the Redeemer prayed,—"that they may be made perfect into one."

John xvii. 17–21.

ver. 23.

> Names and sects and parties fall:
> Thou, O Christ, art all in all!

This is the true goal. It may be nearer than we think.

It is time to recapitulate. We have drawn from the priceless record of the apostle John five constituent elements of the Church, the chief

factors and essential characteristics of the religious society which Jesus Christ founded and left behind Him to carry on His work. The characteristics specified correspond broadly to the five chapters of John, xiii. to xvii. They are these: (1) The cleansing of all the Church's members by His hand from the stains of sin. (2) The infusion into all alike of the Holy Spirit that He gives. (3) Their abiding union with Him, by virtue of which He lives in them and works in the world through them unitedly. (4) Their fellowship in the world's enmity, which they must overcome through the testimony of Jesus and the Spirit of Truth that is in them. (5) Their union perfected in its assimilation to the oneness of Son and Father in the eternal Godhead. From all this we infer that the way to Christian unity lies in a deeper knowledge of the Son of God and a more general conformity to Him.

I have said nothing yet of the position of *the ministry*, or clergy, in the Christian society, nothing of their specific claims and duties. Not that I think this an unimportant matter, either for ourselves or for the Church at large. But it has often seemed to me that this question occupies too large and dominant a place in discussions on the subject. The ministry exists for the sake of the Church and arises out of the Church,

not *vice versa*. We disavow sacerdotalism; we disavow also clericalism, which is a distinct and only less dangerous perversion of Church office. The apostles were disciples first, and brethren first, before they were apostles. They were disciples and brethren always and to the last. In the various functions of her ministry the Church does but specialize and concentrate in particular organs the powers which exist diffused through her whole membership. Christ's people are a spiritual people, filled with the Holy Ghost; and every one of them has spiritual qualities and spiritual duties. Preaching, teaching, public prayer, the care of souls—in all these the ministry has a principal and directing part, but not an exclusive property. Even in establishing the sacraments and committing them to His apostles, our Lord does not prescribe their administration by a definite order of men. That the two sacraments should be ordinarily dispensed by those who are set apart to preach the gospel is in our view a matter of obvious fitness, and belongs to the doing of things decently and in order. It concerns the well-being, not the very being of the Church.

Matt. xvi. 19; xviii. 18. John xx. 22, 23.

We have intimated that the words of Jesus Christ concerning "binding and loosing," and "remitting" or "retaining sin,"

which have been supposed to confer upon the ordained ministry, through apostolical succession, mysterious powers of absolution and to clothe them above their fellows with supernatural attributes,—these great sayings of the Lord had no such design. They are of a wider and more spiritual application. They were meant to be the basis not of the magical powers of a priesthood, but of the moral influence of the fellowship of Christ everywhere. They are fulfilled in every verdict of a sound Christian public opinion, in every word of loving reproof or compassion spoken to an erring Christian brother. By the judgements you pass, by the opinions you express on moral questions, you are binding or loosing every day; and if those judgements spring from a true faith and are guided by the Spirit of Christ, they are sealed in heaven and stand good for ever.

Just so far as any one, whether minister or layman, or humble Christian woman, or innocent child, has the mind of Christ, his or her words and doings carry with them a Divine assent. Have you not sometimes heard words spoken by the most unofficial lips, and in the common intercourse of life, that pierced like the judgement of God, words that tied fast for you some bond of duty, or loosed and dissolved some subtle chain of sin? Strange and awful powers are those we exercise

upon each other. Sacred is the priesthood that belongs to the true man of God, that belongs to the people of God everywhere amidst this sin-bound world. Be it yours to wield that influence, by virtue of your unction from the Holy One. Exercise it in purity of heart and meekness of wisdom. Let your Christian conscience and character do their part in that condemnation of the world by which Christ saves the world. "And ye shall be named"—every one of you—"the priests of the Lord; and men shall call you the ministers of my God."

Isai. lxi. 6. John vii. 7; xv. 24–27. Rom. viii. 3, 4. Eph. v. 11–14.

The Lord Jesus instituted an order of ministry for His Church, not after the sacerdotal pattern, but after a new fashion of His own. He chose the Twelve, who were separated from the other disciples and from the common pursuits of life, that they might "be with Him," that they might be His constant helpers and companions. These were the beginning of a separated and specialized ministry. He called them "apostles," or His "sent ones"—a name in official use amongst the Jews; they were His messengers, His commissioners. In this character He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God, and afterwards other seventy like them, already during His lifetime and by way of trial. After the resurrection He instructed "the eleven and those with

Luke vi. 13; ix. 2; x. 1–16. John xx. 21.

them" that there should be "preached in His name repentance and remission of sins unto all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke xxiv. 44–49. For this purpose He had made them and their associates, apart from others, witnesses of His death and rising, and would send on them "the promise of the Father," the new "power from on high."

In His valedictory words, spoken before the assembled disciples in Galilee, Christ commanded the Eleven, under His universal sovereignty, to "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them" in the Three-One Name, and "teaching them," He says, "to keep all things that I enjoined upon you." In these words He established Christian baptism as the sign of discipleship, the visible gateway of entrance to His Church. To these men alone at the Last Supper He had "appointed a kingdom, that they should sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"; that, in fact, they should be lawgivers in the Church of the redeemed. The New Testament is the concrete fulfilment of that promise. At the same time, the prediction of St. Peter's fall served as the occasion of committing to him a special ministry of edification for his brethren. This comes out more distinctly afterwards, in the 21st chapter of St. John, when, after thrice challenging

Matt. xxviii. 16–20; comp. 1 Cor. xv. 6.

Luke xxii. 28–30.

vers. 24–34.

Simon's love to Him, sullied by his denial, our Lord thrice bids him, "Feed My lambs, tend My sheep, feed My sheep." In his commission, as in his confession, St. Peter was a leader of others and a representative man; he was not endowed with any singular or unshared authority. In his First Epistle, therefore, the same apostle applies this command of Christ to "the elders that are among you," being himself "a fellow-elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ": he says to all ministers of Christ, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising the oversight thereof not of constraint, but willingly, according to God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; nor as lording it over the charge committed to you, but making yourselves an example to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive the crown of glory that fades not away."

John xxi. 15–19.

1 Pet. v. 1–4; comp. ii. 25.

Our Lord thus provided for the exercise in His Church of an official public ministry, a ministry of preachers and of pastors, besides the mutual and universal ministry of all its members. The office of the apostles was essentially a preaching and pastoral vocation; but it included powers peculiar to themselves, and arising from their personal relations to Jesus our Lord, and from the unique inspiration given

Gal. i. 1, 12. 1 Cor. ix. 1.

to them—powers such as could not be, and have not been, transmitted. But Christ alone, and in His own Person, is the Door of the fold for every soul that enters; Christ alone is the Shepherd of God's flock, the Priest of the true Tabernacle. He sets His servants, His under-shepherds, to tend and guard His sheep for Him, choosing them as He will in every age and in every fold where His flock gathers. And as His people know His voice, so they will know the voice of those whom He gives them for pastors and teachers, those who are true shepherds because, like Peter, they love Him, because they have heard His call, because they have been with Jesus and know His ways, and can lead His flock to fit pastures and springs of living water.

John x. 1–18. Heb. xiii. 20; viii. 1, 2; x. 21.

Eph. iv. 11, 12.

But I am speaking not to ministers, but to the people, and to the young people, the treasure and hope of Methodism. Come into the fold! The door is open, and the Good Shepherd calls you. Place yourselves within the fence and inclosure of Christian fellowship. If you have any love to Christ, any fear and hatred of sin, any purpose to serve God, then come and join with us who share these feelings and purposes, which God has planted in your breast. So your love to Christ,

your hate of sin, your power to serve God and to fulfil all righteousness, will increase and grow to the perfect day. If you remain alone, it is too likely that the spark of Divine life will die out of your soul; and the spiritual aspirations of your youth will prove to be as the morning cloud and as the early dew. Do not, I beseech you, play at hide-and-seek with the Church, and expect ministers and leaders to be always hunting after you and coaxing and entreating you to come in, when they should be busy seeking the lost that are far away from the gospel fold. Come and claim your place, and guard your place, in the Methodist fellowship, in the heritage of our Israel. Seek out the pastures where the Shepherd leads His flock and causeth them to lie down. Church member-

1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. Phil. ii. 16–18.

ship is an honour and a privilege; it will be your crown of glorying in the day of Christ, that you loved and served His people.

Matt. xi. 28–30.

If it is a yoke and a burden, it is Christ's yoke and His burden, that we may not decline at will.

It is easy to find reasons for standing aloof; we could all find reasons for doing that, if we were so minded. One reason outweighs them all: the Lord has need of you, and His people and His work have need of you. Where questions of conscience come in, and earnest conviction compels

a young Methodist to join another Church, God forbid that we should reproach him: to his own Master he standeth or falleth; and we pray that he may be holden up. Rom. xiv. 4. But you say, perhaps, Membership is irksome and exacting; you are offended by this and that in our fellowship. Was not human fellowship irksome, think you, to the Son of God? and the cross—was it not irksome? The Church of your birth and baptism, your nursing mother in the faith of Christ, claims you by a parental right. Perhaps she is not beautiful in all respects, not yet as the fair Bride of the Lord, "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing"; perhaps Eph. v. 25-27. there are others, in certain things, more beautiful to your eyes. But she is your mother! The heart of Methodism yearns over you, and you owe to her people a thousand kindnesses. Will you despise or forsake her? Then the Lord shall judge between you and us!

It is sad to think how many of our sons and daughters have left us as they grew up to intelligence and influence,—intelligence and influence that they owed largely to their Methodist rearing and ancestry. Are they gainers by the change? That may not be for us to judge. In some cases we are compelled to think that they are not gainers in the highest

things, not gainers in wealth towards God. Their places are filled by others; and Methodism lives and thrives, with all her losses, and has marvellous powers of recuperation. But how we miss them, the old names and the old families, that once stood in our foremost ranks!

When such losses befall a Church, it is probable that there is fault upon both sides. Let us examine ourselves, and consider kindly and fairly the objections that are brought against our ways. Let us remove every offence and stumbling-block, "making straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way." Let us be more gentle and patient and considerate towards each other. Let us put away our stiff opinions, our hard words, our caste-feelings, our prejudices and resentments, "pursuing after things that make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another." Let brotherly love continue, and heart-fellowship revive and flourish in our midst. So our best days will return, days brighter and better than the best that Methodism has ever known.

Heb. xii. 13.

Rom. xiv. 19.

II.

THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES.

We gathered from our survey of the recorded teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it was His design to form upon the basis of the confession of His name a new community, that should continue to the end of time, and win the world to faith in Him. We noted the moral qualities that were to mark the members of this community, such as child-likeness, purity, sympathy, forgivingness, together with a filial submission to the will of God. These were the tempers which the Lord Jesus sought to form in His disciples, in training them for Church life. We discerned the spiritual elements of the common life that should animate this fellowship. The Redeemer purposed to cleanse the members of His Church by His blood, and to possess them with His Holy Spirit, so that He should Himself dwell in their society, as the vine lives and fructifies in its branches.

Thus they would vindicate Him against the world that cast Him out; and thus, in the end, they would attain a union with each other comparable to that which exists between God the Father and the Son.

These promises and this calling belong, we maintained, to all the members of the Christian society, without distinction. They are the fundamental conditions of its existence, and hold good prior to, and apart from, any question concerning Church office and the differences between layman and minister, ordained and unordained, within the Church. Distinctions of office, specialities of function, necessarily arise in every human society; and our Lord recognised and provided for this need in the appointment of the Twelve, and in the commission given to them to teach all nations, and in the charge that He laid, by way of example, upon St. Peter to feed and tend His flock. Much that belonged to the calling of the apostles was, in the nature of the case, peculiar to themselves; other, more general functions, devolve on the spiritual officers of every Church, and have descended, in various channels, to the Christian ministry of our own day.

So much we had inferred from the record of the Four Gospels respecting the plans and views of the Lord Jesus Christ for the institution which

He called "My Church." We defined this Church as the holy community of Christ's people, called out of the world by the gospel message, and united in work and worship as citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

We see that Church in existence and action immediately after Christ's departure, through the graphic picture which is given us in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The Christian society in Jerusalem consisted, previously to the day of Pentecost, of about one hundred and twenty souls. There were the eleven apostles as leaders, with their number made up to twelve by the election of another to fill the traitor's place; there were the brethren of the Lord, now become His brethren in faith as well as in blood; and there were "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus." These last are associated with the rest in public prayer; and the fact is noted by St. Luke, for it was a new thing, foreign to Jewish practice. "In Christ Jesus there is no male and female," as there will hereafter be "no Jew nor Greek."

Acts i. 12–26.

In answer to their constant prayers, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, the fire-baptism of Jesus; and a single day turned the one hundred and twenty into three thousand souls. We are told little of the organization and outward

Acts ii.

forms of the Pentecostal Church, much of its religious spirit and of the affection of its members for each other. "They attended diligently to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. All that believed were together, and had everything in common; and their goods and property they were accustomed to sell and distribute to all, according as any one had need. And daily they resorted diligently to the temple with one accord; and from house to house, breaking bread; they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." This statement immediately follows upon the account of the ingathering of Pentecost. A little later, in the 4th chapter, we read that "in the multitude of those that had believed there was one heart and one soul; and none of them would say that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ the Lord; and great grace was upon them all. For neither was any one in need among them; for so many as were possessors of fields or houses sold them from time to time, and brought the price of the things sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles; and

vers. 42–47.

Acts iv. 32–35.

distribution was made to each, as any one had need."

O what an age of golden days!

How attentive to the means of grace, how studious to learn the Master's doctrine, were these first disciples! How they loved each other and delighted in each other's company! What boundless hospitality and liberality there was among them!

St. Luke draws our attention repeatedly to the conduct of the holders of property. One of the first and most remarkable fruits of the descent of the Spirit of Christ was a loosening of the purse-strings and a downfall of the idolatry of wealth among these converted Jews. We do not gather from the narrative, as some have done, that private property was abolished and the possessions of the members of the Church thrown together into a single fund administered by the apostles,—that, in fact, *communism* was set up amongst them. But each man held his wealth at the service of the Church, and lavishly used it in her charities. The love of property was entirely subordinated to the love of the brethren. Whenever a case of "need" arose, aid was forthcoming; one or other of the wealthier members stepped forward to raise the necessary sum, by the sale of some field or house remaining to him.

The common meal, or lovefeast (*agapé*), held in the evening when the day's work was done, which survived for two centuries in the early Church, was spontaneously instituted at this time, as a natural expression of the social unity of the believers in Christ. One family in Him, they gathered round one table, each public meal concluding with the "breaking of bread" that commemorated His dying love to them.

It was over money matters, and in the distribution of relief, that the first trouble in the Church arose. "There arose a murmuring of the Hellenists [Greek-speaking Jews] against the Hebrews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily ministration." The dispute led the apostles to devolve their financial duties upon "the seven" *deacons*, as they are commonly styled (but not expressly so by St. Luke)—or *stewards*, as we should call them—who were chosen by the people and confirmed by the apostles. Amongst the men brought to the front in this way, SS. Philip the evangelist and Stephen the first martyr proved to be called to higher work than "serving tables."

Acts vi. 1–6.

A few years later, we find "elders" in office in the Jerusalem Church: when or how appointed we are not told, nor in what relation they stood to the before-mentioned Seven.

Acts xi. 30.

This ordination of elders may have been made when the apostles began to move away from Jerusalem, in order to assume their wider charge. Elders would naturally be created in any Jewish community cut off from the Synagogue, just as magistrates and town councillors in a company of Englishmen thrown together on a foreign shore.

The scene shifts now from Jerusalem to *Antioch*, the great Syrian capital and the third city in the Roman empire. A Church springs up here, into which Greeks are received—uncircumcised Gentiles—on an equal footing with their Jewish brethren. This was an event of vast importance, and raised new and difficult problems. We are to see how manifold is the unity of the Christian Church, how local variety and difference in matters of form are harmonized in the fellowship of the Spirit. St. Peter and the mother Church of Jerusalem had been prepared for this development by the vision the apostle had at Joppa, and by the descent of the Spirit on Cornelius and his house at Cæsarea. Cornelius was baptized and received by St. Peter into the Messianic Church, although he remained uncircumcised, and therefore outside the covenant made with Abraham. St. Peter's act was approved, after discussion, at Jerusalem;

Acts xi. 19–26.

Acts x. 1 to xi. 18.

and the legitimacy of Gentile Christianity was thus settled in principle.

We must remember that while Jesus Christ had directed that His gospel should be preached to all nations, He had given until now no judgement as to whether or not conformity to Jewish rites should be enforced along with it. Here lay the main cause of contention in the Church of the first century. St. Barnabas was sent down to take the oversight of the mixed society at Antioch. He reported favourably of it. He summoned the converted Saul from Tarsus to assist him there. Thus Antioch became the mother city of the Gentile Churches, and the headquarters of St. Paul's missionary operations. Here the Christian community received its distinctive name; for at this great metropolis it stepped forward to the public eye in its unique and independent character. "It came to pass that the disciples were first called *Christians* in Antioch." The Jews called them in contempt "Nazarenes," after Jesus of Nazareth: from this time the rest of the world has called us "Christians." The form of this word suggests to us that it was coined by the Roman authorities of Antioch, when they had occasion to recognise and deal with the new society.

Acts xi. 22–26.

Up to the 13th chapter of the Acts of the

Apostles, St. Peter is the hero of the narrative; from that point onwards it is St. Paul. Called as one born out of due time, and in no official dependence on the earlier apostles, St. Paul's ministry is a striking witness against the doctrine of a mechanical apostolic succession, or grace of orders. Next to Christ, St. Paul was the greatest Church founder and the greatest Church teacher that ever lived. The task of the new apostle was to spread Christianity through the Roman empire. The elder apostles knew well that this work had to be done; but it is one thing to apprehend a great truth in principle, another thing to grasp its practical bearing and to carry it into effect. St. Peter had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles; it was for St. Paul to lead the nations through that open door. He became, as he says, the "teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." St. Paul's letters lie before us, and reveal the progress of his work; they reveal his inmost thoughts respecting the Church of which he was so wise and successful a builder.

1 Cor. xv. 8–11. Gal. i. 1, 12, 16, 17; ii. 6.

Matt. xvi. 19. Acts xv. 7.

1 Tim. ii. 7. Gal. i. 16. Acts xxii. 21.

We take up the earliest of them, the two brief epistles that the apostle addressed to the Thessalonians, in the middle of his career and when engaged on his first European mission. We find

that the Church established in Thessalonica was a thoroughly social body. "Love of the brethren" characterized these hearty Macedonian believers. Further than that, we see the apostle knitting the bands of fellowship in Christ between distant lands. "Not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place," he writes, "your faith has gone abroad. . . . You became imitators of the Churches of God that in Judæa are in Christ Jesus." The Church of Thessalonica, like that of Jerusalem, formed a charitable fund. There was no need to urge the men of means to contribute to the common purse, but rather to warn the indolent against drawing from it. In the Second Epistle the apostle lays down the wholesome rule that "he who will not work, shall not eat" the Church's bread.

1 Thess. iv. 9, 10; iii. 12.

1 Thess. i. 7–10; ii. 14.

1 Thess. iv. 11, 12. 2 Thess. iii. 6–14.

This Church had a stated ministry—"those who labour amongst you, and preside over you in the Lord, and admonish you"; whom it is bidden to "esteem highly in love for their work's sake." But at the same time all the members of the society are expected to take part in the cares and labours of mutual edification. A lively social and spiritual intercourse was evidently carried on in the Church meetings at Thessalonica.

1 Thess. v. 12–22.

The next group of St. Paul's letters brings us, a few years later, to *Corinth.* 1 Corinthians admits us to a near view of one of the most remarkable and richly gifted of the primitive Christian communities. There is much in that view that surprises, and even shocks us. It is a very different scene from that of the Pentecostal days at Jerusalem. These are no

> Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,
> Who lived, and spake, and thought the same!

What clamour, what wrangling, what display among these clever and factious Greek townsmen! At the same time, what energy and vivacity, what abundance of spiritual power! From the middle of the 10th chapter in this long letter to the end of the 14th chapter, St. Paul is occupied with the disorder of their lovefeasts and society meetings, disorder due in part to the exuberance of talent and spiritual excitement called forth in them by the new faith. But there were positive evils at work in this confusion—especially the spirit of faction, which has been at all times the bane and peril of free and popularly governed Churches. "One saith, I am of Paul; another, I of Apollos; another, I of Cephas; and yet another, I of Christ." This is what the apostle calls

1 Cor. i. 4–12; iii. 3, 4; iv. 6–8; viii. 1, 2.

1 Cor. i. 10; xi. 18, 19. Tit. iii. 10.

"schism" and "heresy,"—the venom of party-spirit, the division of heart within the Church, which is the mother of disruption and religious war. Hence he insists here, with all his might, on *love*, exalting it above knowledge, above miracles and prophecy, and even above faith; and the most famous chapter in the Epistle is the 13th, the matchless commendation of charity.

In this, still more than in the Thessalonian Epistles, we see the need for strong moral discipline in a Christian Church, and the necessity of means for the prompt expulsion of immoral men. And this responsibility is laid on the body of the Church.—In the 16th chapter of this, and the 8th and 9th of the next Epistle, St. Paul earnestly presses on the Gentile Churches a general collection for the poor in Jerusalem, teaching them to extend their charities beyond local objects, and fostering the union of Jewish and Gentile believers by this means. In other matters, also, he is working for the establishment of a common rule and practice throughout the Churches, for what we should call "connexional usage." Speaking of certain objectionable things at Corinth, he says: "We have no such custom, nor the Churches of God"; and again: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the Churches." There is

1 Cor. v.

1 Cor. xi. 16; xiv. 33–40.

no distinct allusion to Church officers here; but he enumerates amongst the necessary organs of the body of Christ the things that "God had appointed in the Church, governments and aids"—expressions corresponding to the "bishops and deacons" who come into view in later Epistles. Perhaps such appointments had not yet been made in this democratic Church, and it was one of the things that St. Paul meant to "set in order" when he came again.

1 Cor. xii. 28; comp. Rom. xii. 5–8.

1 Cor. xi. 34.

In the 10th and 11th chapters we see how the Lord's table was the centre of Church fellowship at Corinth,—not the sum of communion, but its centre; not the test, but the privilege of membership. The Lord's Supper distinguishes the Christian society from Gentile idolatrous communions, and sets forth the unity of Christ's people, partakers of the "one loaf" and cup, which denote the one body and sacrificial blood of the incarnate Saviour. This ordinance is guarded by awful sanctions: he who abuses it is "judged of the Lord."

1 Cor. x. 14-22; xi. 17–34.

But we must not linger at Corinth. Two points only will we note in the Galatian Epistle. First, the antipathy of the apostle to sins of strife, to what he calls "biting and devouring one another." Secondly,

Gal. v. 15, 20, 26; vi. 6-10.

that a ministry of teaching, as well as ruling, was set up in the Pauline Churches; and the society contributed to its temporal maintenance.

In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul discusses at length the great social difficulty of the early Church, *viz.* the intercourse of Jewish and Gentile Christians. It was difficult for them to meet in society, difficult for Jews to eat or take the Lord's Supper with Gentile converts without a breach of Jewish rules, which those brought up as strict Hebrews were unwilling to commit; and Jesus Christ, they might reasonably plead, had given them no instruction to do so. With the greatest earnestness and tact the apostle sets himself to overcome this hindrance. He deals with it on the principles upon which all hindrances to social religious fellowship amongst Christians must be dealt with, and overcome. Sacrifices of feeling, of taste and usage and convenience, must be made upon both sides; they will be made, if the spirit of love is real and strong amongst us. Two maxims Paul lays down, which are of perpetual application. The first is, "For meat destroy not the work of God" (and to renounce Christian fellowship is to do that); and again, "Receive ye one another, as the Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

Rom. xiv. 1; xv. 13.

Rom. xiv. 20; xv. 7.

In the Roman and First Corinthian Epistles St. Paul uses the figure of *the body*, with its many organs and their manifold uses, to set forth the nature of the Church. He shows in this way how great is the difference of gift and office distributed by the Holy Spirit in the Christian society; how necessary are all its parts to each other, not less so the more obscure and humble; and how foolish are jealousy and contempt and assumptions of independence on the part of members of Christ towards their fellows. But it is in the third group of his letters, especially in the Epistle to the Ephesians, that the full bearing of this analogy comes out. The teaching of Ephesians respecting the Church is related to that of Romans and Corinthians very much as we found the teaching of St. John's Gospel related to that of St. Matthew.

Rom. xii. 4, 5. 1 Cor xii. 12–27.

In the Acts of the Apostles and the earlier letters we find societies of Jewish and Gentile disciples sitting side by side at the Lord's table, engaged in the freest mutual edification, holding their worldly means at the service of the community, and forming in all respects a spiritual family, brothers and sisters to each other because they are sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty and the One Spirit of His Son dwells in all their hearts.

2 Cor. vi. 18. Gal. iii. 28; iv. 6, 7.

Brotherly love is the bond of their union; strife and party-spirit are its destruction.

Behind this visible scene of Church fellowship the later Epistles open to us mysterious and far-reaching views. The glory of the Church is seen to correspond, in its height and duration, to that of Christ her Lord. The Christian community is to Christ Jesus what the body is to the head in the human frame. She gives Him hands with which to work, lips with which to speak, the medium by which He can express Himself and work out His redeeming thought and purpose for mankind. The Church is the vessel, the vehicle of His fulness, which is in turn the fulness of the Godhead. As the ocean receives the fulness of the sea, as the wide plains and mountains receive the fulness of the mighty winds, and the heavens the fulness of the streaming sunlight, so the Church, in her length, breadth, depth and height, the entire commonwealth of redeemed souls, is called to comprehend and receive into herself the greatness of the Christ. To hold back from fellowship with His people is therefore to deny to Christ Jesus your co-operation in this great object; it is to refuse to receive your share in the fulness of God.

Eph. i. 22, 23; iii. 16–19; iv. 10, 13–16. Col. i. 18; ii. 9, 10, 19.

Combined with the image of the body in St.

Paul is that of *the building*, suggested by our Lord when He said, "I will build My Church." This metaphor is so developed as to allow for wide external differences, consistently with the maintenance of the same underlying foundation and the control of the same informing Spirit. "You Gentiles," he writes, "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the family of God. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself for chief corner-stone. In whom every building, being fitted and adjusted together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built with the rest for a habitation of God in the Spirit." Many Christian societies were rising in different lands, Petrine and Pauline, Jewish and Gentile foundations, varying in their forms of worship and administration, and locally distant from each other. But the common faith, the One Spirit made them one; and "every building" established on the rock Christ Jesus formed a part of the vast structure, and in adjustment with the rest helped to make the Divine temple more complete. The Church is a cathedral, with its clustered shrines and chapels; a palace, not all covered by one roof, but with a hundred buildings, of various styles and sizes, in

Eph. ii. 19-22; iv. 12, 16.

its precincts. While the construction is going on, the variety is more evident than the unity. When the Architect completes His plan and fits these fragmentary parts together, we shall do Him and His work better justice.

Eph. v. 22–32; comp. 2 Cor. xi. 2. John iii. 29. Rev. xix. 7–9; xxi. 9. Matt. xxii. 2; xxv. 1.

In the same Epistle Christ figures as the husband, and the Church His *bride*. A perfect wedded love is a picture of the bond that unites Christ to the Christian community. Self-devotion, authority, tender and solicitous care upon His part; purity, submission, self-devotion on her part, belong to this marriage. The glorious prospect is in view of that complete and visible union between the Lord Christ and redeemed humanity, brought about by the abolition of death, which St. John describes in the Revelation as "the marriage supper of the Lamb." So far does the apostle Paul carry this view that he regards the institution of wedlock as having its ideal in the relation of Christ to His Church. This relation, he believes, existed in the mind of the Creator when the first human pair came into being. The perfected fellowship of the Son of God with mankind is, in fact, the crown of all God's purposes respecting our race from the beginning. Christ's winning of the Church is the love-story of the ages.

Eph. v. 30–32.

Since the Church is thus the body and the bride of Christ on earth, since she is the house of His presence and the progressive incarnation of His Spirit, St. Paul assigns to her a great part in the field of history. He writes of Jew and Gentile as "made one" by "the breaking down of the middle wall of partition." Christ came, he says, to "create in Himself of the two one new man [one new humanity], so making peace; and that He might reconcile both in one body unto God through the cross." Again: "Through Him we both have access in one spirit to the Father." Accordingly, he says to the Colossians: "There can be no Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all things, and in all."

Eph. ii. 11–18.

Col. iii. 10, 11.

In the hostility of Greek and Jew were involved most of the causes of human enmity and division. What is said of this hatred applies in principle to all class hatred and national antipathies. The Church of Christ is the destined pacificator of mankind. Her children are God's peacemakers. The cross will be the centre, and the Church the mediator, of universal reconciliation. What Bishop Westcott did the other day in the county of Durham—a peaceful scholar, with no authority but that of his pure character and his position at

the head of a great Christian body—what he did in bringing capitalist and labourer together and making them shake hands, concluding a ruinous industrial war, will take place universally and on the largest scale. The time will come when the Church throughout Christendom will step in between the national combatants; she will strike down their weapons, she will spike their cannons and disband their armies, and bid them settle their contentions like men and not like brute beasts, by reason and by justice instead of bloodshed. And the voice of Abel's blood shall be heard crying from the ground no more!

Gen. iv. 8–15. Heb. xii. 24.

You see that St. Paul's teaching expounds that of his Master. They are alike, too, in this—that it is the character of the Church, the brotherhood of its members, their common relation to Christ and possession by His Spirit, that stand in the foreground; and matters of organization, of government and office, are treated as secondary and incidental. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" are enumerated as Christ's gifts to the Church, rather than rulers over it. Their object is not to do the work of the Church for it, but to equip and enable every saint for his "work of ministry," to draw out

Eph. iv. 7–12.

and direct the energies of the whole body. "To each single one of us," he says, "was grace given . . . for the building up of the body of Christ." All grace is a gift for edification. There are to be no useless hands or sleeping partners in the Church's business, none who receives without giving back. In a healthy body every tissue, fibre and artery has its office to discharge, nothing is wasted or inert or superfluous; so in a healthy Church: "According to the effectual working in the measure of each single part, it builds up itself in love." Such was St. Paul's ideal for the societies he directed; it is the ideal of Methodism.

Eph. iv. 16.

The "elders" of the Acts, the "pastors and teachers" of Ephesians, are described as "bishops" in the address of the letter to Philippi; and along with these "bishops," their "deacons," or assistants, are specified. The speech of Paul to the elders of Ephesus, which was delivered a few years before his Epistle to the same Church, prepares us for the change of expression. There he says in his charge: "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit made you overseers" (*i.e.* "bishops"; the words are precisely the same), "to shepherd the Church of God." *Elders* (or *presbyters*), *bishops*, *pastors*—these are

Phil. i. 1.

Acts xx. 28.

corresponding and convertible terms for the office of a Christian minister. Paul's last writings, addressed to Timothy and Titus, tell us much about the qualifications of the primitive officers of the Pauline Churches—the bishop-elders and deacons—who have their counterpart, as we take it, not only in our ordained ministry, but also in our local preachers, class-leaders, and stewards. Through all these instructions you see that the apostle's chief concern is for character in those who serve the Church—for godliness, for moral purity and consistent faith.

1 Tim. iii. 1–13. Tit. i. 5–9.

Two passages in these latest letters impress on us in the highest degree St. Paul's sense of the grandeur of the Church, and the responsibilities attaching to Church office. In 1 Timothy iii. 15, 16, he writes: "That thou mightest know how thou oughtest to behave in God's house, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and stay of the truth." The truth concerning Christ is indeed the Church's foundation, and in its certainty lies the guarantee of her existence. But the truth rests and relies on her, in turn, for its maintenance against the world. So far as she is pure, worthy, faithful and united, so far the truth of Christ is sustained and vindicated. The greatness of Christian service lies in the greatness of the Church in which it is rendered; and her greatness

lies in the greatness of the saving truth she holds in trust for mankind.

The other text I refer to, *viz.* 2 Tim. ii. 19–21, is equally solemn and weighty. The apostle has deplored the unfaithfulness of some of his converts: "Nevertheless," he cries, "the solid foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His; and, Let every one that names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and clay vessels; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If therefore a man cleanse himself from these [from all taint of unrighteousness and unfaith], he shall be a vessel unto honour, useful to the Master, for every good work made ready." It is an honourable house in which we serve who bear the Lord's name, and pure should all its furniture and vessels be. The society of Christ and His brethren and the work of His Church supply the strongest incentives to a worthy personal character. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord,"—nay, that are yourselves His vessels! Though the Church comes to you now in humble form, and the fellowship she offers and the sphere she allots you may seem poor and ordinary, can you not discern her hidden glory? Do you not feel the privilege of membership in a

Isa. lii. 11.

living Church, and the dignity of the meanest service in her ranks, be it but to wash the dust from His disciples' feet?

In very cursory fashion we must review the other apostolic teaching. St. James represents the opposite pole in New Testament thought to that of St. Paul. St. James was tenacious of Jewish ways, being stationary at Jerusalem and steeped in Old Testament faith and feeling. Yet his views of Church life, so far as his letter indicates them, were essentially at one with St. Paul's. Though writing to the Jews of the Dispersion, he says not a word about circumcision or ritual. He appeals only to "the law of liberty," the "royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." He sternly condemns the arrogance and exclusiveness of the rich, the ambition of the forward, loquacity, evil-speaking and censoriousness in all ranks, and the faith of a dead orthodoxy—the very evils that infest Church life to-day. To James the Church is an essentially social institution, a school of purity, humility and charity.

James i. 25; ii. 8–13; iii. 1–7; iii. 1. 5–12; ii. 14–26.

St. Peter's First Epistle adds several striking traits to this delineation. He addresses himself "to the elect sojourners in Pontus, Galatia," and other regions, transferring to the Church the idea taken from the

1 Pet. i. 1, 2; ii. 11.

dispersion of the Jewish people,—*viz.* that the children of God are strangers in this world and have elsewhere their country. Verse 22 of the 1st chapter implies that the purifying of individual souls through faith awakens intense brotherly love amongst them. This apostle appropriates to the new society the old ideas respecting the people and priesthood of Israel; he finely blends St. Paul's conception of the spiritual house with his own recollection of the words of our Lord addressed to him in conferring his name of Peter, when he writes: "To Whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, yourselves also as living stones are built a spiritual house, for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The apostle assumes, as a matter of course, that if one is in Christ, one is also in His Church. Detached stones are mere rubble. There is contact, cohesion, mutual attachment and support in these "living stones" of God's spiritual house. Based on the "living stone," the bed-rock of the Church, they grow together into God's glorious human temple.

1 Pet. ii. 4–10.

Finally, we come to the doctrine of St. John, at once the simplest and most profound of the apostolic writers, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Not a word has John to say about Church administration, about bishops, priests, and deacons; his one concern is that there shall be a right spirit in the body of Christ. I can but state barely the main points of his doctrine. "Love to the brethren," he insists, is inseparable from "love of the Father." To speak of loving God when we do not love the children of God and show our love in practice, is mere talk and lies. Such love to God in His children is the opposite of love to the world, with its threefold mark of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life." Love to our brethren is the fruit in us of the redeeming love of Christ. Its fountain is the cross and the bosom of the Father. It is kindled in our hearts and its flame sustained by the breath of the Holy Spirit. Love of our brethren is the surest sign of God's indwelling, and the ground of a safe confidence against the Day of Judgement. Considering all this, with what holy pathos does St. John cry, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God!"

1 John ii. 7–11; iii. 10–23; iv. 7, 8, 16, 20, 21.

1 John ii. 15–17; iii. 13, 14.

1 John iii. 16, 19, 24; iv. 9–13, 17–19.

Tradition tells that this dear apostle in his extreme age was used to be carried on his chair into the assembly of the Church at Ephesus; and when all listened reverently for his words, he

would say only this: "Little children, love one another." And when they asked, "Father, why do you always say this to us, and nothing more?" he replied, "Because it is the commandment of the Lord; and because when this is done, all is done."

The volume of Scripture closes with the Apocalypse. There we find a solemn message from the Lord Jesus to the Seven Churches of Asia, a message which it becomes all His Churches to consider and lay to heart. We see how, on the one hand, a body of kindred Churches situated in one district are grouped together in the view of Christ, and form a connexion; but, at the same time, each local society has its separate character and peculiar responsibility. I am not sure what "the angel" of those Churches signifies; but he seems to represent the collective spirit of each community, like one of those combined photographs that are produced now, in which the features of the different members of a family or group of persons are blended into one typical portrait. In these seven pictures there are both bright and very dark colours. Foul corruptions entered into some Christian societies, even in apostolic times.

Rev. ii., iii.

Laodicea teaches us how loathsome a Church becomes to its Lord when sunk in wealth and

ease. We see what a stern duty lies on the Church to purge itself from that which is unchaste or false. We see what fierce trials, even unto death, had fallen upon some of these Christian communities of Asia, and with how great courage they were met. We behold, above all, the jealousy with which the Lord watches over His Bride on earth, how deeply He is concerned for the purity and fidelity of every Church of His saints.

Can we be indifferent to these things, that so deeply engage and interest Him? How vain it is for any Christian to imagine that by withdrawing from Church membership he clears himself of responsibility! To ignore our duties is not to efface them. Christ will never be separated in our thoughts and our affections from His bride. If you love Him, you must love His Church,—and that part of His Church in particular to which your personal affiance belongs, to which the ties of providence and grace have linked you. You must love His Church for His sake, till you can love her for her own. You must believe in His Church as you believe in Him—in her sanctity, and in her glory. There your own highest glory lies. Faith will not commit the impiety of severing the members from the Head.

Methodists of Leeds, young Methodists, I speak

to you. We call ourselves now, and without bated breath, the *Wesleyan Methodist Church.* We have not been hasty or eager in any way about this. We have been content for a century in the fact without the name. Our societies have all along constituted a true fellowship with Christ in the Spirit, as John Wesley very plainly said. They have possessed a Church life as real as any that exists upon earth. But if any one previously doubted this, if any one supposed that by speaking of "the Methodist Connexion," or "Societies," instead of the Church, and by calling our sanctuaries "chapels" and not churches, we confessed that our spiritual position was inferior to that of other Christian communities in this land, and that men could not find in our society all that the necessities of the Christian life and the nourishment of the soul in grace require—if any one drew this inference from our former manner of speech, he must now be undeceived. We quietly but firmly claim, as Methodist people, to constitute a *Church* of Jesus Christ, a sisterhood and confederacy of Churches throughout the world. We make that claim as justly as does the Anglican Episcopal Church, or the Presbyterian, or Baptist, or Congregationalist Churches.

And we are satisfied that the Head of the Church acknowledges our claim—that He has

raised us up for a people to Himself. Of the elder Churches we can say: Are they Israelites? so are we. Are they of the seed of Abraham—of the apostolical succession, heirs of the ancient creeds, children of the saints and martyrs, sons of the Reformation, of the Puritan stock, of the evangelical seed? so verily are we. Latimer and Ridley, Jewel and Hooker, Baxter and Howe and Owen, George Herbert and John Milton,—these names we cherish, and the great traditions of English Christendom we honour and maintain as much as any. Have other Churches wrought for the saving of the English people, for the purifying and ennobling of the nation's life, for the spread of the name and kingdom of Christ not in this land only, but through our colonies and dependencies, and in the heathen world?—"I speak as a fool," but I am speaking for our fathers when I say that, if they have done all this—men of the English Establishment, men of the Scottish and Baptist and Independent Churches—in proportion to our means, we have done more. Methodism has become co-extensive with the English race; and its branches, like a fruitful vine, have run over the wall. We are not ashamed of our Church; we might be ashamed of ourselves that we care for her and study her so little.

We assert our rights; we must be faithful to our duties. Let us be true to our history and genius. Let us love the brotherhood. Let us cherish and perfect in its application the principle of Christian fellowship that has begotten us and bound us together as a people. To us, above others, Christ has committed in these days His own social conception of religion. There are two things that seem to me most vital to our Church life, and there is an intimate relation between them—our doctrine of Christian perfection, and our doctrine of Christian communion. They are to many of us a perpetual reproof; but they are a perpetual stimulus, and a perpetual necessity. Speaking for myself, born in Methodism as I have been, I value it, I cling to it, I hope and prophesy good concerning it for its social religious character more than for any other single reason.

To us the Church is not the priesthood, the ritual, the form of sacrament or government; it is *the society of Jesus.* We find its germ-cell in the little company of brother disciples gathered round the Master in common talk and at a common table. The entire aggregate of the Christian Church throughout the world is formed by the repetition, multiplication, and reproduction in ten thousand varied forms, of that germ-cell; it is the development of the original communion of

Christ and His spiritual brethren. Wherever that society is reproduced, in a Methodist class-meeting or elsewhere, in the companies of friends and brothers drawn heart to heart by the music of His name, there is the fellowship of the first ages; there is visible by its looks of gladness and affection, and audible by its songs of praise and words of sweet counsel, the authentic and living Church of Christ Jesus the Lord.

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst," He said. That sentence is the charter, and the rule of our Church life.

THE END.

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